

# **BELGIUM: Wallonia, Flanders want to ban ritual slaughter, including on religious grounds**

By Dan Alexe

NewEurope (26.04.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2pN8jUs> – Next week, the Walloon Parliament in Belgium will vote on the proposal to ban the ritual slaughter of animals, to the dismay of the representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths who still hope for a compromise consistent with the freedom of worship.

Lawmakers in both Flanders and Wallonia have agreed to ban kosher and halal slaughter by 2019, a move that triggered the protest of the World Jewish Congress, who gave today a tribune to Philippe Markiewicz, the president of Belgium's Central Jewish Consistory.

Markiewicz called the discussions between the Flemish and Walloon regions aimed at reaching a total ban on ritual slaughter by 2019 “a crisis without precedent, if not the biggest crisis since World War II.”

Markiewicz also called it an affront that Geert Bourgeois, head of the Flemish regional government, had suggested during a recent debate on the issue that the question of ritual slaughter was related to integration of immigrants into Belgian society.

In 2016, Belgium's Council of State issued a ruling that a complete ban on ritual slaughter would violate the country's constitution and recommended a compromise to be sought, in

consultation with Jewish and Muslim religious communities. However, at present, a majority of lawmakers in both Flanders and Wallonia seem determined to ban slaughter without prior stunning completely. The parliament of Brussels-Capital region has not yet formulated a position on the matter.

Muslim and Jewish communities in Flanders have criticised the proposal by the Belgian region to ban the unstunned slaughter of small animals, which they say would contravene their rules for ritual killing.

Under the draft law, animals like sheep and poultry will have to be stunned electrically before being killed, which most animal rights campaigners say is more humane than the Islamic halal and Jewish kosher rituals. Both require that butchers swiftly slaughter the animal by slitting its throat and draining the blood.

The bill has broad support in the predominantly Catholic region, and the opposition from Flanders' religious minorities illustrates the difficulties facing some European countries as they struggle to integrate immigrant populations.

The issue could play with a wider audience, including right wing politicians and animal rights campaigners, who generally support the legislation.

As stunning larger animals is not possible without also fatally wounding them, the proposed law requires animals such as cattle be stunned immediately after their throats are cut if slaughtered in a ritual manner.

Belgium's Muslim community said its religious council has previously expressed its opposition to stunned slaughter and there had been no change in its stance since then.

"Muslims are worried about whether they can eat halal food ... in conformity with their religious rites and beliefs," the Belgian Muslim Executive said.

The Flemish Jewish community said it was studying the proposal and that stunned slaughter was not in line with Jewish religious laws.

While the proposed law would only apply to the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders in the north of Belgium, other Belgian regions are planning similar moves.

Countries including Denmark, Switzerland and New Zealand already prohibit unstunned slaughter.

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